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THE RIGHT OF PEOPLES TO SELF-DETERMINATION AND ITS APPLICATION TO PEOPLES UNDER COLONIAL OR ALIEN DOMINATION OR FOREIGN OCCUPATION

Written statement submitted by the Association for World Education, a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[20 December 1999]

GE.00-10472 (E)

A "United States of Abraham": after one decade (1990-2000)

1. Forms of regional integration are increasingly considered as the principal methodology for general security, development and the safeguard of human rights. Individual, national and regional security should be accompanied by a spirit of mutual acceptance - with economic cooperation and development as a direct by-product.

2. The European Union and the wider Council of Europe, the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Commonwealth countries are a few examples of close relations involving regional integration and the promotion of human rights, even if much still remains to be achieved there - and elsewhere. The time has now come to envisage a form of Middle East regional structure.

3. On 6 March 1990, inspired by Winston Churchill's historic 1946 Zurich speech which envisaged a future "United States of Europe", a similar Middle East framework was proposed at the Commission on Human Rights, to be called: "A United States of Abraham".[1] Since then, that vision of regional integration offering security and human rights within a future Israel-Jordan-Palestine grouping, and beyond, has been propagated at the United Nations and in other circles. Therefore, the greater part of that text is reproduced here, with a few later reflections and parallel remarks by leaders of the region that highlight such positive trends in the Middle East:

> "[...] The Middle East - this noble ancient region - is the fountain of the three Abrahamitic faiths. It is the spiritual origin of more than half of humanity. If the Middle East were united in the sharing of its common inheritance, there would be no limit to the happiness, to the prosperity and the glory which its tens of millions of people would enjoy. Yet it is within the Middle East that have sprung frightful nationalist and religious quarrels, which have wrecked the peace and marred the prospects of that vast area of the world.
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> "Yet all the while there is a remedy, which if it were generally adopted by the great majority of people in these lands, would as if by a miracle transform the whole scene, and would in a few years make all of the Middle East, or the greater part of it, free and happy. What is this sovereign remedy? It is to create the 'Family of Abraham' and to provide it with a structure under which it can dwell in peace, in safety and in freedom. We must build a kind of 'United States of Abraham'. The process is simple. All that is needed is the resolve of millions of men and women to do right instead of wrong and to gain as their reward blessing instead of cursing.
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> "And why should a future United States of the Middle East not take its rightful place with other great groupings and help to shape the onward destinies of man? In order that this should be accomplished, there must be an act of faith in which millions of men and women, speaking their diverse languages, must consciously take part. With regard to the past, there must be what that great nineteenth century British statesman, William Gladstone, called: 'A blessed act of oblivion'. All must turn their backs upon

the horrors of the past. All must look to the future. One cannot afford to drag forward across the years that are to come the hatreds and revenges which have sprung from all the various injuries of the past. If the Middle East is to be saved from infinite misery, and indeed from final doom, there must be this act of faith in the concept of a 'Family of Abraham' and this act of oblivion against all the crimes and follies of the past. Can these peoples of the Middle East rise to the height of these resolves of the soul and of the instincts of the spirit of man? If they can, the wrongs and injuries which have been inflicted will have been washed away on all sides by the miseries which have been endured. The people have only to will it and all will achieve their hearts' desire.

"The first step in the creation of the Family of Abraham must be a partnership between Israel, Jordan and the Palestinians within that geographical area designated as 'Palestine' in the original 1921 Mandate of the League of Nations. The structure of the 'United States of Abraham', if well and truly built, will be such as to make the material strength of a single State less important. Small nations will count as much as large ones and gain their honour by their contribution to the common cause. The ancient Peoples, Nations and modern States of the Middle East, freely joined together for mutual convenience in a federal - or other - system, might eventually take their individual places within this unifying concept, or condominium. I shall not try to make a detailed programme for tens of millions of peoples who want to be happy and free, prosperous and safe. If this is their wish, if this is the wish of so many peoples living in so many lands, they have only to say so, and means can certainly be found, and machinery erected, to carry that wish to full fruition. Time may be short. At present there is a breathing-space. The cannons have ceased firing. There is a lull in the fighting, but the dangers have not stopped. If there is to be a United States of Abraham, work on this concept must begin now.

"Under and within the world concept of the United Nations Organization, one must create the Family of the Middle East in a regional structure called, it may be, the United States of Abraham, and the first practical step would be to form a Council of Abraham. If at first all the Peoples, Nations and States of the Middle East are not willing or able to join the Union, one must nevertheless proceed to assemble and combine those who will and those who can. The salvation of all the peoples in the Middle East from war or servitude must be established on solid foundations. In all this urgent work, Israel, Jordan and the Palestinians must take the lead together. [...]

"Winston Churchill's vision of Europe has taken nearly half a century [spoken on 6 March 1990] to become reality. May Arab and Israeli political leaders and intellectuals - and also the representatives of all the region's minorities - act with determination, so that peace and reconciliation will come at last to the Middle East, in an upsurge of enthusiasm. If this should be the peoples' desire, surely wise leaders would wish to achieve, within the next decade, genuine peace and reconciliation (Sohl, in Arabic; Shalom, in Hebrew). Was it not written in the prophetic Biblical Book of Joel 'Your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions' (2:28). May the dialogue begin now, perhaps even here at this Commission."

4. The 6 March 1990 statement was delivered personally to Mr. Shimon Peres - then in the opposition. It was published on 24 December 1990 by the Palestinian Jerusalem weekly, Al-Fajr, which printed a second long follow-up Opinion on 31 May 1993: "A Time to Every Purpose Under Heaven: The Peace Process and New Forms of Regional Integration", signed jointly by David Littman and René Wadlow - two months before the Oslo Accords were announced and four months before the September 1993 Declaration of Principles was signed in Washington between Israel's Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat.

5. On 22 September 1992, Prime Minister Rabin told the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defence Commission: "I place great importance on the transitory period and on the intermediate agreements with the Palestinians. But I do not exclude the possibility of a union with them which would guarantee Israel's security and its right to develop within the framework of a confederation or a federation between us, the Palestinians and Jordan" (Jerusalem Post, 23 September 1992).

6. In an interview published in Le Monde (2 September 1992), King Hassan II of Morocco, spoke about "that idea for an Israeli-Palestinian-Jordanian Confederation and its positive aspects for peace in that region of the world [and of] the great dream of a multi-religious and multiracial peace, which would be an extraordinary thing for the sons of Abraham".

7. In June 1993, just before the Oslo agreement, Shimon Peres, who had just become Foreign Minister, stated: "I suggest the establishment of an Israeli-Palestinian-Jordanian Confederation" (Haaretz, 24 June 1993). And King Hussein of Jordan declared, on the White House lawn: "For many, many years and with every prayer I have asked God Almighty to help me be a part of forging peace between the children of Abraham" (25 July 1994). Indeed, on signing the Israel-Jordan peace treaty three months later, he declared: "This is an honourable peace, a balanced peace, a peace that will last because from the first instance it was our determination to make it so". To which Prime Minister Rabin replied: "I believe this is the most beautiful act, to end not only the state of war, but to establish the structure of peace, to build the relations of peace". In a nutshell: to be a model for others.

8. A Palestinian State is now on the horizon and a new spirit of mutual acceptance will flourish in the region when individual security and dignity for all will become rooted in law. This can happen only when a general process of democratization and respect for human rights - and minorities too - becomes the natural bedrock of civil society in all the countries of the Middle East - what has been rightly called "taking the path to democracy".

9. As we have affirmed since 1993, just as European integration began with the modest step of the Coal and Steel Community, so water management in the Middle East today could set the stage for more highly developed forms of cooperation and integration. One cannot afford to talk about the crucial water issue from a narrow perspective or in a nationalist context - only scientifically.

10. Regional security will require a more balanced relationship between the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon, whose independence must be guaranteed after the withdrawal of all

foreign troops from its soil, linked to a broad economic and social integration between the Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Israel, and a future Palestine. Syria is a key to regional peace, and any Israeli withdrawal from the Golan plateau is only possible if mutual confidence exists, backed by military and diplomatic guarantees. Although this vision of the future has still not yet been accepted by all the parties, a new spirit of cooperation may well lie beyond the current clouds of contention.

Notes

[1] Reprinted in Human Rights and Human Wrongs, No. 8 (World Union for Progressive Judaism, Geneva, 1990), pp. 37-39. See summary record of the 52nd meeting of the forty-sixth session of the Commission on Human Rights (1990).

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